

Frederich August Froebel (1782-1852)

The Play-Way Method

Froebel, the founder of the Kindergarten was born on April 21, 1782 in Oberweiback, a village in South Germany. He lost his mother when he was just nine months old. His father remarried when Froebel was only four years of age. His father was indifferent towards him and his step mother's treatment was very unfair. Thus he was deprived of parental affection, love and care. At the age of eleven he was adopted by his uncle who was associated with a church near his village. In school, he was considered as a dunce.

At the age of fourteen, he became an apprentice to a forester. It was here that he developed a deep love for nature and acquired the habits of observation and concentration which characterised him throughout his life.

At seventeen, he joined the University of Jena where he was profoundly influenced by the idealistic philosophy of Fichte and Schelling. On account of financial difficulty, he discontinued his studies.

For four years, he remained a 'career-wanderer'. He wandered from place to place, picking up professions of different nature and failing miserably in them, one after the other.

Interest in Education

A turning point came in the life of Froebel when he began to study architecture at Frankfurt. There he came in contact with Dr. Grunner who was the Director of a model school. Dr. Grunner discovered that Froebel had the potential to become an excellent teacher and persuaded him to join his school. This marked a turning point in his life. Froebel was greatly satisfied and he found his 'long missed life element' and was 'inexpressibly happy'. He declared, for the first time "I found something I had always longed for, but always missed, as if my life had at last discovered its native element; I felt as happy as a fish in the water or a bird in the air".

After spending three years at Frankfurt, Froebel paid a visit to Pestalozzi's institute at Yverdun. There Froebel learnt in detail the principles and method of Pestalozzi. Froebel's contact with Pestalozzi prepared him for carrying out his own experiments which led to the founding of his own school.

In 1816, Froebel established a small school at Griesheim which later on was shifted to Keilhau. In this school, Froebel developed his own principles and methods of instruction. After passing through several vicissitudes, this school became a successful institution in a period of ten years. 'Play' and 'art work' were the chief features of this school.

Publication of *The Education of Man*

In 1826, Froebel published his famous book *The Education of Man*. In this he says: "The true method of education consists in considering the mind of the child as a whole in which all the parts work together to produce harmonious unity". After this he started many schools in Germany. The Government suspected the revolutionary ideas of Froebel and an enquiry was conducted. The inspector gave a favourable report: "I found here a closely united family of some sixty members held together in mutual confidence and every member seeking the good of the whole—The aim of institution is by no means knowledge and science merely, but free self-active development of the mind from within".

Froebel's Work

On account of financial difficulties, Froebel shifted his work to Switzerland in 1830. The Swiss Government appreciated his work and sent for training under him. He then moved to Burgdorf. There he became a superintendent of an orphanage. He continued his work of training teachers. There he realised that due to non-availability of education in the pre-school age, the school suffered and did not get good raw material—the educand.

Froebel returned to Germany in 1836 and founded his first kindergarten in 1849 in the village of Blankenburg. He married his kindergartener in 1849. He spent his whole time in the founding and devising his apparatus for kindergartens.

His views were not accepted by the German Government and forbade him from establishing any school. This was a great shock and he could not long survive it. Froebel died in 1852, in poverty, misery and agony. His grave is marked by a slab with a cube, a cylinder and a sphere on it.

Main Features of Educational Philosophy and Principles

1. *Object of Education*: In Froebel's own words, "The object of education is the realisation of the faithful, pure, inviolable and hence holy life. The divine essence of man should be unfolded, brought out, lifted into consciousness, and man himself raised into free, conscious, obedience to the divine principle that lives in him and to a free representation of this principle in his life. Education should lead and guide man to clearness concerning himself and in himself, to face with nature, and to unity with God".

Froebel maintains that the aim of education is not to make the mind of the child a jumble of words. He writes: "The essential business of school is not so much to communicate a variety and multiplicity of facts as to give prominence to the ever living unity that is in all things". Again he writes: "Human education requires the knowledge and appreciation of religion, nature and language in their intimate living reciprocity and mutual interaction. Without the knowledge and appreciation of the intimate unity of the three, the school and we ourselves are lost in the fallacies of bottomless, self-provoking diversity." So the aim of education is to enable the child to realise the unity in diversity.

2. *Principle of Development*: Froebel asserts: "Each individual must develop from within, self-active and free, in accordance with the internal law".

3. *Mind of the Child as a Living Whole*: According to Froebel, "The true method of education consists in considering the mind of the child as a living whole in which all the parts work together to produce harmonious unity".

4. *Creativeness of Childhood*: Froebel proposed a new concept of childhood. He stressed that childhood is not merely a preparation for adulthood. Childhood is a value in itself and possesses its own creation. An adult has no right to feel superior and to interfere with the nature of children. Rather the adult must first understand the child and then guide him accordingly.

5. *Inner Relatedness of all Education*: This means that that educator ought to lead the child through such situations as will help to relate his experiences organically one with another. Only then can the child realise his own personal unity and the unity inherent in the diversity of life.

6. *Totality of Educational Endeavour*: In order to realise the driving character of the universe and his part in it, man needs his senses and emotions as well as reasons. They all are windows of the soul. Hence Froebel emphasised the totality of educational endeavour.

7. *Play and Activity*: According to Froebel, "Play is the purest, most important activity of man at this stage. It gives, therefore, joy, freedom, contentment, inner rest and peace with the world. It holds the source of all that is good". Froebel recognised that play needs to be organised and controlled on definite materials so that it may not degenerate into aimless play "instead of preparing for those tasks of life for which it is destined".

8. *Freedom to the Child*: The child should be educated in free atmosphere. Freedom means obedience to self-imposed law.

9. *Social Aspect*: Froebel stressed the social aspect of education also. He believed that all social institutions like the home, the school, the church and the State, etc. are the agencies of development of the individual wherein he is to realise the unity in diversity.

10. *Importance of Songs*: He devised songs, gestures and construction as the chief means of stimulating the imagination of the child.

11. *Role of the Teacher*: The teacher is like a gardener who carefully nurses and protects children in order to secure their full and free development along most desirable lines. The educator by his efforts assists the educand who is developing according to the law of his nature to attain levels that would be denied to him.

Kindergarten: Meaning, Objective and Environment

Meaning of the Kindergarten: Kindergarten is a German word which means a children's garden. Froebel conceived the school as a garden, the teacher as the gardener and the students as tender plants. The teacher, like the gardener, looks after the little human plants and waters them to grow to beauty and perfection. Froebel discovered great similarity between a child and a plant. He believed that the process of growth and development of the plant and the child is the same. The plant grows from within according to the seed that is within. In the same way the child grows from within. He unfolds his tendencies and impulses from within.

Objective of the Kindergarten: In the words of Froebel, "The objective of a kindergarten is to give the children employment in agreement with their whole nature, to strengthen their bodies, to exercise their senses, to engage their awakening mind and through their senses to make them acquainted with nature and their fellow creatures. It is specially to guide the heart and the affections, and to lead them to the original ground of all life, to unity with themselves".

Environment of the Kindergarten: The environment of the kindergarten is to be that of freedom, play and joy – an environment which fosters self-expression. There are to be no books or fixed intellectual tasks for children, but training in expression is to be given in three ways – songs, movements and construction. These three are to go together. Though the means are separate yet the process is connected as a whole, e.g., when a story is told or read, it is expressed in song, dramatised in movement and gesture, and illustrated by construction from blocks, paper, clay or drawing. Thus the child's imagination and thought are encouraged and stimulated by concerted means. His hands and limbs, his eyes and other senses are trained by making him do certain things.

Chief Characteristics of Kindergarten

1. *Free Self-Activity*: Froebel regarded self-activity as a process by which the individual realises his own nature and builds up his own world and then unites and harmonises the two. An inspector reported about this self-activity: "Self-activity of the mind is the first law of this institution, the kind of instruction given here does not make the young mind a strong box into which, as early as possible kinds of coins of the most different values and coinage, such as are now current in the world that are stuffed, but slowly, continuously, gradually and always inwardly that is according to a connection found in nature of the human mind, the instruction steadily goes

on without any ticks, from the simple to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract, so well-adapted to the child and his needs that he goes as easily to his learning as to his play".

The following points should be noted regarding activity:

- (i) It should not be vague.
- (ii) It should be a sublimated or controlled activity.
- (iii) Social atmosphere is essential in order to secure meaningful activities.
- (iv) Self-activity may take the form either of work or of play.

2. *Play*: According to Froebel, "Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage. ... It gives, therefore, joy, freedom, contentment, inner rest and peace with the world. It holds the source of all that is good". Froebel recognised that play needs to be organised and controlled on definite materials so that it may not degenerate into aimless play instead of preparing for those tasks of life for which it is destined". There should be rational conscious guidance. Consequently, Froebel has given seven gifts to children to play with.

3. *Songs, gestures and construction*: Froebel saw an organic relationship between songs, gestures and construction. He regarded these as three coordinate forms of expression in the child. What is to be learnt by the pupil is first expressed in a song, then it is dramatised or expressed in gesture or movement and lastly illustrated through some constructive work such as paper or clay. Thus, a balanced development of the mind, the speech organs and the hand is aimed at. These three activities provide exercise to the senses, limbs and muscles of the child.

4. *Gifts and occupations*: For providing appropriate activities, Froebel devised suitable materials known as gifts. The gifts suggest some form of activity and occupations are the activities suggested by gifts. These have been carefully graded. They possess all the novelty of play things. The order of the gift is devised in such a way as it leads the child from the activities and thought of one stage to another.

5. *Role of the Teacher*: The teacher is not a spectator and a passive person. He is expected to suggest suitable occupations when gifts are given to children. He demonstrates certain activities to them. He also sings a song with a view to help the child to form appropriate ideas.

A teacher has important responsibilities to perform. He has to inculcate sympathetically values like love, sympathy, humility, cooperation and obedience to elders.

6. *Positive Discipline*: The teacher has to avoid external restraint and bodily punishment. The child should be made to realise that discipline depends upon his love for order, goodwill and mutual understanding. Froebel stressed that women should be trained for training children at this stage.

7. *Curriculum*: It is in term of activities. The divisions of the curriculum are:

- (i) Manual work.
- (ii) Religion and religious instruction.
- (iii) Natural science and mathematics.
- (iv) Language.
- (v) Arts and objects of art.

Froebel's Gifts

For the complete education and training of child, Froebel devised a series of gifts. The gifts comprise carefully graduated series of materials which possess all the novelty of playthings, and form the basis of his educational method. They are to train the senses of sight and touch, to give the child an idea of size and surface, and to present him a correct idea of number. The activities suggested by these gifts are called occupations. The gifts are given to the child in a certain order. The gradation and order elements of gifts are determined by the principle of development. The gifts are twenty in number although only the first seven are now usually called by this name.

Gift I

It consists of six coloured woollen balls, three in primary colours, red, yellow and blue, and three secondary colours, orange, green and purple. The occupation consists in rolling them about in play. Thus they develop in the children the idea of colour and material, form, motion, direction and muscular sensibility.

Gift II

It consists of a sphere, cube and cylinder made of hardwood. In playing with these gifts, the child notices the difference between the stability of the cube, and the mobility of the sphere. He observes that the cylinder is both stable and movable, and that it harmonises both the qualities in one.

Gift III

It is a large cube divided into eight smaller equal cubes. From these the child can build up a number of useful artistic forms such as benches, steps, doors, bridges, etc. and for this reason the third gift is often called the *first building box*. The child can also gain elementary ideas of addition and subtraction through these cubes.

Gift IV

It consists of the large cubes divided into eight oblong prisms in each of which the length is twice the breadth and the breadth is twice the thickness. This helps the child to construct different kinds of buildings and patterns when combined with the third gift.

Gift V

It is every much like the third gift. It consists of a large cube divided into twenty-seven small cubes, three of which are again divided diagonally into

halves and three into quarters. The child can construct many beautiful forms and patterns by combining the third, fourth and fifth gifts. Form and number can very well be taught by the use of this gift.

Gift VI

It is again similar to gift four. In it there is a large cube divided into eighteen whole and nine small oblong blocks. Still further designs in forms and construction may be made by the child. It is also useful in teaching numbers.

Gift VII

It is also a set of square and triangular tablets made of fine wood in two colours. It provides material for several exercises in geometrical forms and mosaic work.

Other gifts consist of materials such as stick-laying, perforating, paper-cutting, threading of beads, mat-making, embroidery, basket-making, wire work, drawing and modelling.

Play-Way Method

Froebel used play for the development and growth of the child in the kindergarten established by him. This method came to be known as the play-way method in teaching-learning.

Play-Way is thus a method which envisages that all work should be done in the spirit of play. Play-Way is quite different from the normal meaning of the word play which is considered as a form of physical activity. Play-Way, on the other hand, is a means for the cognitive, and affective development of the child, *i.e.*, development of intellect, skills and feelings.

Principles of Play-Way Method

1. Principle of growth and development of the child through play.
2. Principle of self-development under teacher's guidance.
3. Principle of self-activity.
4. Principle of self-expression through play.
5. Principle of spontaneity.
6. Principle of freedom.
7. Principle of happiness and joy in play activities.
8. Principle of unity.
9. Principle of aesthetic appreciation.
10. Principle of creativeness.
11. Principle of drawing out.
12. Principle of discipline through love.
13. Principle of sense training.
14. Principle of concrete to abstract.

Gifts, Occupations, Songs, Gestures and Construction in the Play-Way

We have already stressed the place of activity and play. To provide activities, Froebel devised suitable materials known as gifts. The gifts suggest some form of activity and occupations are the activities suggested by gifts. These have been carefully graded. They possess all the novelty of play things. The order of the gift is devised in such a way as it leads the child from the activities and thought of one stage to another. Froebel saw an organic relationship between play, songs, gestures and construction.

Play-Way Activities Connected with Songs

Selection of Songs. Froebel has given songs in his book *Mother and Nursery Songs*. There are fifty play songs. The idea of the introduction of songs is to enable the child to use his senses, limbs and muscles and also to familiarise him with the surroundings. The child begins to use language through these songs. Each song is accompanied by a game such as 'Hide and Seek'. The selection of the song is determined by the teacher in accordance with the development of the child. There are three parts in a song.

1. A motto for the guidance of mother or teacher.
2. A verse accompanied by music.
3. A picture illustrating the song.

The song for drill is:

Let us have a drill to-day,
March along grand array,
And whoever steps the best,
Shall be captain over the rest,
And lead us on our way.

Play-Way Activities Based on Gifts and Educational Objectives

Some Examples:

<i>Educational Objective</i>	<i>Components of the Gift</i>	<i>Activity</i>
1. Enabling the child to learn the concept of colour, form, motion, direction, and muscular sensitivity.	Six coloured balls of different colours.	Children are required to roll these balls in play-way attitude of mind.
2. Enabling the students to learn the concept of stability and mobility and to differentiate between these two.	One sphere. One cube. One cylinder – made of hard wood.	Children are required to observe the stability and mobility of each article while playing.
3. Enabling the students to learn the concepts of addition and subtraction.	One large cube divided into eight smaller equal cubes contained in a box.	Children are required to build a number of forms, e.g., benches, doors, etc.

<i>Educational Objective</i>	<i>Components of the Gift</i>	<i>Activity</i>
4. Enabling children to develop concepts of designs or patterns.	A large cube divided into eight oblong prisms. Each has a length twice its breadth and breadth twice its thickness.	Children are occupied in the building of a variety of patterns by using these prisms.
5. Enabling the children to develop the concepts of form and number through gifts 3, 4 and 5.	Gift 5 consists of a large cube divided into 27 small cubes. Three of these are sub-divided diagonally into halves; three further sub-divided into halves; three further subdivided into quarters.	Children are occupied in developing a variety of forms using gifts 3, 4 and 5.
6. Enabling the children to develop the concept of numbers.	Large cubes divided into eighteen wholes and nine small oblong bricks (Like gift 4).	Children are directed to develop designs using the material of the gift.
7. Enabling the children to acquire the concept of mosaic and geometrical forms.	A set of triangular and square tablets of fine wood in two different colours.	Children are directed to prepare geometrical forms and mosaic work.

Role of the Teacher

The teacher plays the role of a gardener who looks after the tender plants. He provides an environment of life and freedom. He plans his work very carefully and demonstrates the play-way activity. He always keeps in mind the chief objectives which the gifts and songs should serve.

Merits of Play-Way Method

1. It stresses the importance of play in early education.
2. The gifts and occupations of the Kindergarten give a new approach to method of teaching.
3. The inclusion of creative work in the school makes children creative workers.
4. There is sufficient scope for activity in a Kindergarten.
5. Various gifts provide sensory training.
6. The inclusion of nature study in the curriculum helps to develop love for nature and the world in the mind of the students.

Limitations of Play-Way Method

1. In the Kindergarten, too much stress is laid on the development from within.

2. Songs as given by Froebel are out of date. These cannot be used in every school.
3. The gifts of Froebel are formal in nature.
4. The order of presentation of gifts is arbitrary.
5. They do not serve much purpose of sense training.
6. There is little of correlation in the teaching of various subjects.
7. It is not possible to accept his excessive emphasis on play in education as it is likely to detract the child from serious learning.
8. Philosophy on which Froebel based his method is very complicated. It is very difficult for children to understand his symbolism.

Contribution to Educational Thought and Principles

Froebel has made a very valuable contribution to educational theory and practice. Froebel's Play-Way finds place in the teaching-learning process at all stages of education and in all subjects. Following are the important elements which are emphasised by modern educators and thinkers:

1. *Respect for the Child's Individuality*: Froebel lived for children, worked for children and died for children. He had profound love and sympathy for children.

2. *Emphasis on the Study of the Child*: Froebel stressed the need for the study of the nature of the child, his instincts and impulses. Modern educator is very careful to see that adequate scope is provided for the free play of the impulses and instincts of children.

3. *Education Through Play*: Froebel believed that play is the highest phase of self-development. He introduced Play-Way in the activities of the school. Today we find that the principle of Play-Way has been accepted by every educator. We teach children through songs, movements, gestures, dramatisation, hand-work, etc.

4. *Activity in Education*: Froebel was the first educator to make self-activity as the basis of education. 'Learning by doing' is the slogan of the day.

5. *Sense Training*: Froebel introduced gifts for the training of the senses of children. With the help of these gifts, he wanted to give the idea of shape, form, colour, size and number. Audio-visual aids form an integral part of the present system of education.

6. *Nature Study in Education*: For Froebel, nature study was a means of bringing the child nearer God. He advocated nature study to enable the child to understand the world in which he lives and to develop habits of careful observation. This idea has become so popular that we do not regard any school worthy of name if it does not provide for nature study.

7. *Women Teachers at the Nursery Stage*: It will not be wrong to say that it is due to the influence of Froebel that we find a trend to entrust the education at the pre-primary or pre-basic stage to women teachers who are considered to be more suited for this task of instruction at this stage.

8. *Stress on Nursery or Pre-Primary Education:* The present educator fully recognises the importance of the education in the early years. Today we find a large number of schools catering to the needs of such children. Froebel often said, "Until the education of nursery years was reformed nothing solid and worthy could be achieved."

9 *New Conception of School:* His kindergarten school was a little world where responsibility was shared, by all, individual-rights respected by all, brotherly sympathy developed and voluntary co-operation practised. His school was an ideal society in miniature.

Froebel's Eternal Message

'Come! Let us live for Children''.